

**Planning and Outcome Measurement:
Staff Involvement, Choosing Which
Outcomes to Measure, and
Using Outcome Data**

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Submitted for Outcomes Summit II

Cincinnati, Ohio

June 24-26, 2004

Executive Summary

Recognizing that results matter and the need to document better the effect of its work, Legal Aid of Western Ohio, Inc. (LAWO) started developing a comprehensive outcome measurement system in 1999. The system was developed by a staff committee after extensive review of systems used by other programs and consultation with other staff members. The resulting system was tested in late 1999 and implemented in 2000. Assessments were conducted in 2001 and 2002, leading to changes in the outcomes codes and definitions.

Outcome data is used to file more accurate reports with funders; in community relations materials to document the quantity and value of our services; in internal reports as a means of boosting staff morale; in program planning; and in promoting community change. The Defiance office in particular has been able to use outcome data, in conjunction with other data and discussions with other community based organizations, to improve services available to domestic violence victims. The improved services include enhanced access to the criminal and civil justice systems and a more comprehensive, holistic response to the needs of domestic violence victims.

INTRODUCTION

Results matter. Counting cases is not enough. The impact our work has on changing lives, changing communities, and changing state and national policies and programs that significantly affect our clients can only be accomplished if we measure results and identify best practices and practices that need to change. Many funders require outcome measurement to evaluate programs as a condition of continued funding. Outcome measurement allows us to talk about actual results for people – for both individuals and groups. Outcome measurement allows us to define program goals and objectives and provide direct feedback and recognition for those accomplishing the goals and objectives. Identifiable results help to build teams, improve morale, and demonstrate the role of legal aid as agents of social change across the nation.

STAFF INVOLVEMENT AND CHOOSING WHICH OUTCOMES TO MEASURE

Staff involvement in identifying outcomes and developing the outcome measurement instrument is critical to successful measurement. In the summer of 1999, a committee was formed to review outcome measurement instruments that other programs were using and to develop at Legal Aid of Western Ohio an instrument for our program. The committee was made up of persons with expertise in each substantive area. Unlike most program measurement instruments, the committee developed a lengthy, detailed, comprehensive codebook which has continued to grow since 1999.

In October 1999, we trained each unit within our program on how to use the outcome measurement instrument and developed a one month test form to determine how user friendly and comprehensive the code book was. The test form was used during the month of November 1999. In December 1999, we conducted a program wide training on outcome measures. In January 2000, we began tracking outcomes. In May and August of 2000, we made changes to the codebook, clarifying codes and adding codes based upon feedback from advocates in the program who were using the instrument.

In October 2001, we were able to evaluate the data we collected in 2000. We reviewed the outcomes of individual staff persons, different offices, and the program as a whole. We found that there were discrepancies in how financial outcomes had been coded, especially in domestic relations cases. We also found that when using a codebook with an extensive list of codes, the codes need to be clustered for reporting purposes to give an accurate picture of results. In October 2001, we developed guidelines for coding financial outcomes in domestic relations cases.

In 2002 and 2003 we had meetings with each substantive unit to identify codes that are not used, codes that have multiple meanings, and codes that are missing. We are presently making changes to our codebook to reflect the feedback given during those meetings.

USING OUTCOME DATA

Making effective use of outcome data is an area that LAWO is continuing to develop and improve. Over the past few years, we have used outcome data to file more accurate reports on our activities with various funders; in community relations materials to document the quantity and value of our services; in internal reports as a means of boosting staff morale; in program planning; and in promoting community change.

Using Outcome Data in Funding Reports

The United Way agencies from which LAWO receives funding have been the most advanced in the use of outcomes measurement systems. Being able to document specific outcomes for particular case areas fits well with United Way's Logic Model format.

For our single county funders, we can document specific results for residents of that county. The following example of the use of outcome data is excerpted from a report filed with the United Way of Defiance County:

In 2003, attorneys in the LAWO Defiance office closed 92 of the 134 Defiance County legal cases worked on in 2003. *In 100% of these cases, at least one positive outcome was achieved for the client.*

In 34 (29%) of the closed cases, LAWO successfully represented domestic violence victims. Outcomes in these cases were as follows (many cases had more than one outcome):

- 26 victims were given a divorce and/or protection order by the court
- 18 victims won custody or appropriate visitation arrangements for their children
- 16 victims were awarded child and/or spousal support
- 06 victims received legal advice, counsel, or advocacy and then reconciled or withdrew
- 52 children were members of the households that benefited in these cases.

An additional 18 cases opened in 2003 on behalf of domestic violence victims are still pending. Victims of domestic violence and their families received \$47,031.71 in spousal support and property and debt settlements and \$121,896.94 in child support.

In 10 (11%) of the closed cases, LAWO successfully represented persons on housing issues such as eviction defense and substandard housing conditions. Outcomes in these cases were as follows (many cases had more than one outcome).

05 low-income individual or family had illegal evictions or foreclosures prevented; or eviction was delayed long enough for the family to find alternative housing.

11 low-income individuals or families received advice and counsel, advocacy, referral, or other benefit on housing matters.

In 10 (11%) of the closed cases, LAWO successfully represented low-income individuals and families to help them obtain or maintain eligibility for government benefits that were being incorrectly denied. Outcomes in these cases were as follows (many cases had more than one outcome).

06 individuals obtained or had income or health care benefits preserved, such as Medicaid, Social Security (disability), Ohio Works First, Disability Assistance, and Food Stamps.

04 individuals were awarded social security disability or SSI.

In 38 (18%) of the closed cases, LAWO successfully represented low-income individuals and families on other legal issues such as consumer problems, employment, and senior citizen issues. Outcomes in these cases were as follows (many cases had more than one outcome)

22 individuals had living wills, wills, durable power of attorney for health care, and/or power of attorney prepared.

18 individuals received advice and counsel, referral, or other benefit related to a legal matter not described above.

Being able to document monetary awards has been particularly useful in reporting on our work. In the Defiance County United Way report, we were able to document \$168,927 in monetary relief to domestic violence victims on an investment of \$20,240 in United Way funding.

Using Outcome Data in Reports to the Community and Staff

Outcome data has been invaluable in reporting to the community on our services. The ability to document monetary awards again can be compelling. Monetary awards information is captured in several areas, including child support; spousal support; supplemental security income; unemployment compensation; disability assistance; state cash assistance; food stamps; damages; and debt write-off. Within each of those areas, we can document both benefits that accrue on a monthly basis and lump sum awards.

Using this system, we documented that in 2003 we secured \$5,186,100 in on-going, monthly benefits for our clients, and \$3,637,069 in lump sum awards. With a combined investment of approximately \$5,000,000 in LAWO and our affiliate agency, Advocates for Basic Legal Equality, Inc. (ABLE), these figures document a significant rate of return on the investment of public and private funds in our services.

Being able to report on specific outcomes, including the monetary outcomes, also has been good for staff morale. Combined with effective client stories, the data allow us to document the effect of our services on clients' lives.

Using Outcome Data in Program Planning and Implementation

Outcome data can be used in program planning and implementation. This area has the greatest potential for use. By looking at outcomes measurement data in combination with attorney time records, we can assess our services and identify both areas of strength and areas in which we might need to devote additional resources. In the area of housing, for example, attorney time records will allow us to assess the amount of staff time spent on housing cases. The outcome data allow us to identify specifically both what we achieved with that time investment, and what we did not achieve. As an example, if no data is generated for achieving reasonable accommodations for housing accessibility, we can identify a need to do more outreach with our local disability advocacy center.

Using Outcome Data for Community Change: The Defiance Example

In 1992, Advocates for Basic Legal Equality (now, Legal Aid of Western Ohio) recognized the ineffective response of all agencies in Defiance County in responding to the issue of domestic violence. In 1992, we were not measuring outcomes and drew conclusions based on anecdotal evidence. We noticed that many victims of domestic violence were returning to abusive homes due to financial reasons and lack of housing, and often felt more in danger when leaving their abuser than when they stayed.

In January 1993, the Defiance County Domestic Violence Taskforce was formed. Judges, prosecutors, law enforcement officials, domestic violence advocates, legal aid, social service representatives and medical providers came together to identify the problem and develop a comprehensive community wide protocol for addressing the issue.

In August 1993, the protocol was complete. In October 1993, all law enforcement officers were trained on the law and the protocol.

In 1994, we began tracking domestic violence cases in Defiance County to see if the protocol was effective. We were surprised to see the tremendous impact that the community wide collaboration was having in the criminal justice response to domestic violence.

Pre-Protocol

Prior to the Protocol we filed 25- 44 domestic violence cases a year. A total of 6 felony cases were filed in the four years prior to the protocol – 5 were dismissed.

Post-Protocol

As the following chart illustrates, the years following the development and implementation of the Protocol saw a significant increase in the number of domestic violence cases and convictions.

	CASES FILED FELONIES FILED	CONVICTIONS ON ORIGINAL CHARGE		DISMISSALS & NOT GUILTY
		Municipal Court	Municipal Court	
1994 (10%)	156	76%	24%	16
1995 (7%)	150	68%	32%	11
1996 (9%)	209	74%	26%	19
1998 (17%)	157	71%	27%	26
1999 (25%)	137	83%	16%	35
2000 (15%)	163	80%	20%	25
2001 (18%)	176	83%	17%	32
2002 (20%)	173	85%	15%	34

Legal Aid of Western Ohio recognized the tremendous impact that the improved criminal justice response was having on a victim's ability to get out of an abusive situation. When law enforcement officers have reason to believe that domestic violence has occurred, officers file the charges and make an arrest. Abusers are not released on bond until after the issuance of a temporary protection order at arraignment giving the victim exclusive use of the residence. Consequently, in most case, victims do not have to go to a shelter or uproot their family. Officers consistently enforce protections orders through immediate arrest and officers charge second offenses as a felony. These practices increase victim safety and send a message to the community that domestic violence is a crime and will not be tolerated. Ongoing trainings, taskforce meetings, and public outreach has increased awareness of domestic violence in the community and among judges, prosecutors, law enforcement officers, social service agencies, medical providers and employers. This increased understanding has led to improved response to the needs of victims of domestic violence.

In 2000, Legal Aid of Western Ohio began reporting outcome measures to the Defiance County United Way. In that year, attorneys in the LSNO Defiance office closed the legal cases of 97 Defiance County residents. **In 35 (36%) of the closed cases, LSNO successfully represented domestic violence victims.** Outcomes in these cases were as follows (many cases had more than one outcome):

- 6 victims received Civil Protection Orders or other legal protection
- 12 victims were given a divorce or separation by the court
- 8 victims won custody or appropriate visitation arrangements for their children
- 3 victims were awarded child and/or spousal support
- 8 victims received legal advice, counsel or advocacy
- 4 victims reconciled with the other party
- 6 victims withdrew their requests for CPO or divorce.
- 48 children were members of the households that benefited in these cases.

An additional 22 cases opened in 2000 in which divorces filed on behalf of domestic violence victims were still pending at the end of 2000.

This data allowed us to compare our numbers to the number of victims going through the criminal system and to see the number of victims who applied for assistance, but did not follow through with a protection order or a divorce. Working with victim advocates, the courts, law enforcement, and the prosecutors office we developed strategies to better bridge communication gaps between and among the agencies and to allow for better referrals between the criminal and civil legal services, allowing us to provide a more holistic and comprehensive approach to the delivery of legal services.

In 2001, attorneys in the LSNO Defiance office closed the legal cases of 84 Defiance County residents. **In 43 (51%) of the closed cases, LSNO successfully represented domestic violence victims.** Outcomes in these cases were as follows (many cases had more than one outcome):

- 6 victims received Civil Protection Orders or other legal protection
- 24 victims were given a divorce or separation by the court
- 16 victims won custody or appropriate visitation arrangements for their children
- 18 victims were awarded child and/or spousal support
- 13 victims received legal advice, counsel or advocacy
- 8 victims reconciled with the other party
- 8 victims withdrew their requests for CPO or divorce.
- 76 children were members of the households that benefited in these cases.

An additional 38 cases opened in 2001 on behalf of domestic violence victims were pending at the end of 2001. Victims of domestic violence and their families received **\$142,007.90** in spousal support and property and debt settlements and **\$101,893.58** in child support.

The outcome data from both the criminal cases and our outcome data for legal aid suggest that the strategies we developed were effective in increasing victim access to civil legal services. For 2002, we decided to identify additional barriers to victims who wish to leave abusive relationships.

In 2002, attorneys in the LSNO Defiance office closed 113 of the 154 Defiance County legal cases worked on in 2002. *In 100% of these cases, at least one positive outcome was achieved for the client.* **In 53 (47%) of the closed cases, LSNO successfully represented domestic violence victims.** Outcomes in these cases were as follows (many cases had more than one outcome):

- 23 victims were given a divorce and or protection order by the court
- 22 victims won custody or appropriate visitation arrangements for their children
- 23 victims were awarded child and/or spousal support
- 30 victims received legal advice, counsel or advocacy and reconciled
- 79 children were members of the households that benefited in these cases.

An additional 28 cases opened in 2002 on behalf of domestic violence victims were still pending at the end of 2002. Victims of domestic violence and their families received \$103,075.16 in spousal support and property and debt settlements and \$69,359.64 in child support.

In 2003, the Defiance County Taskforce reviewed outcome data from 2000 through 2002 to identify additional barriers to victims of domestic violence. Housing, access to jobs or other financial assistance, transportation, childcare, language barriers, immigration issues, and religious beliefs were critical issues to victim participation in the criminal process and the civil process. We identified the lack of collaboration and access to records with surrounding rural counties as an additional barrier. Many victims in Defiance County are working, going to school, relocating, etc. in neighboring counties. We are missing critical data from other counties that would assist in establishing stalking cases, enhancing charges, and conducting safety planning. Also, law enforcement practices – i.e., investigation, charging procedures, and enforcement of protection orders vary from county to county.

To address these barriers, taskforce members began discussing collaboration with five surrounding rural counties. Together, the six counties applied for the Presidential Initiative Family Justice Center Grant to develop enhanced communication and comprehensive services to victims of domestic violence, stalking, and sexual assault that would be centralized in one main center in Defiance and satellite offices in five surrounding counties.

To address housing barriers, Legal Aid is partnering with the housing coalitions in the six county area to develop a comprehensive plan for increasing permanent and

transitional housing for victims of domestic violence. Legal Aid has also collaborated with Defiance County Habitat for Humanity to give priority to domestic violence victims and to partner in addressing the housing and civil legal services needs of victims – repair credit records, divorce, access to public assistance or disability assistance, etc. There is significant interest in developing a statewide plan for increasing housing options for victims. Action Ohio, a state-wide domestic violence coalition, is sponsoring a workshop in August 2004 to begin planning for a statewide housing initiative. Legal Aid and Advocates for Basic Legal Equality also are teaming up with the Ohio Hispanic Coalition, Rural Opportunities, and domestic violence and sexual assault advocates to address housing issues, language barriers, and access to legal services among immigrant battered women, migrant farmworkers, refugees, and other non-English speaking victims.

Lack of access to telephone service is another barrier for victim safety. Legal Aid is participating on the Sprint Lifeline Advisory Board to identify strategies for providing access to telephone service to low income persons, domestic violence victims, and disabled persons in the Sprint service area.

To increase collaboration with healthcare professionals assisting victims of domestic violence and sexual assault, Legal Aid is collaborating with the Ohio Domestic Violence Network to provide training to domestic violence and sexual assault advocates and healthcare professionals across the state on issues facing domestic violence and sexual assault victims and their families.

To improve the law enforcement response and increase community collaboration across the state, Legal Aid is collaborating with the Ohio Peace Officer Training Academy to provide a series of trainings to law enforcement on domestic violence, stalking, sexual assault, and protection orders, and on the importance of a coordinated community response. The Defiance County Domestic Violence Taskforce and Legal Aid have been providing technical assistance to counties around the state interested in developing a community wide collaboration.

Outcome data provides invaluable information at the individual level, agency level and community, state, and federal level. By measuring results, we can identify best practices for providing our clients with the most effective access to justice and identify areas for improvement. The initiatives discussed above stem largely from our ability to document and track client outcomes and develop new projects based on those outcomes.